



Cyber-bullying among Youths on Social Networks: A Case of Western Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

We are moving to a world where youths have greater access to ideas, information and opportunities. This study explores whether or not the Ethiopian youths are practicing online harassment through social networks. The objective of this research is to analyze the age and gender dynamics of youths regarding cyber-bullying through social networks. There are three target population of this study from where the sample is drawn: teen cyber café visitors, cell phone using older youths and laptop using professional youths. For the first target population, systematic random sampling is used whereas for the second and third snowball sampling is applied. The sample size (n=264) comprises of questionnaire (n=252) supplemented by interview from key respondents (n=12). The data is collected and analyzed keeping in view the age and gender dynamics and the result is presented.

KEYWORDS : cyber-bullying, online harassment, social networks, youths' communication

INTRODUCTION

'Bullying' is often defined as being an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend himself or herself (Whitney & Smith, 1993; Olweus, 1999). Bullying is a form of abuse that is based on an imbalance of power; it can be defined as a systematic abuse of power (Smith & Sharp, 1994; Rigby, 2002). Using these definitions for bullying, we can extend them to define Cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying, therefore, can be defined as an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend himself or herself (Smith et al 2008). Cyber-bullying is "an overt, intentional act of aggression towards another person online" (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008) or a "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices" (Hinduja and Patchin 2008).

"Social networks" are online communities that give opportunities to connect with, or provide resources to, clients, colleagues, family, and friends who share common interests. There are many different types of social network sites, many of which are free, and they range from general to those tailored for a specific demographic or interest area. Examples include Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Skype etc. In each social network, a profile is created that describes a person or organization, and then people are invited to join as "friends." (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this paper is to assess and compare the age and gender dynamics of youths regarding threats of cyber-bullying on social networks.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this research is to understand gender (male and female) and age (younger and older) dynamics of cyber-bullying on social networks among youths.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research has been accomplished through mixed design wherein both quantitative and qualitative tools have been employed.

PARTICIPANTS

The subjects of this research study are social networks users falling under teen and youth category. An individual who had used social networks through Internet at least once in the last 1 month is the participant of the research. The participants are the desktop user teens from five cyber cafes, cell phone user youths from five universities and laptop user professional youths of different organizations of the Nekemte town.

INSTRUMENTATION

This study has employed mixed method (questionnaire and interview). The tool used for quantitative data is self administered questionnaire. The questions are of both open and close ended types. In order to get better response, both single and multiple choice questions are included in the questionnaire. A pilot study coupled with a preliminary study of 5 cases has been done to add value in the questionnaire. 12 qualitative interviews have also been carried out from key informants for complementing the quantitative data.

STUDY AREA

The study is conducted in Nekemte town of Oromia region in Ethiopia situated at the elevation of 2088 m, and the location of this city is 9 degree 50 north latitudes and 36 degree and 330 east longitudes. It is at the center of the road network for south western Ethiopia. The town is fairly developed having about 10 cyber cafes, 200 EVDO connections and 500 CDMA users through which social networks is used on the internet (Ethiopian Telecommunication, 2012).

SAMPLE SIZE

The sample size of this study is 264. A total sample size of 252 is determined for quantitative survey using the assumptions of desired precision 5percent and confidence level 95 percent. The sample includes both male (n=126) and female (n=126) youths and early (n=111) and matured (n=141) youths. The size of the sample is statistically derived. 12 In-depth interviews have been conducted from key informants.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

There are three target population of this study from where sample is drawn. They are teen cyber café visitors, cell phone using older youths and laptop using professional youths. For the first target population i.e., teen cyber café visitors, systematic random sampling is applied. For the second (cell phone using older youths) and third (laptop using professional youths) target group snowball sampling is applied.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The questionnaire is piloted and translated. The survey sample includes teen desktop users in 5 different cyber cafes of town; cell phone using older youths in 5 different universities of the town, and laptop (EVDO/CDMA) using professional youths of the town. For collecting qualitative data as complementary, 12 key informants were selected. They were: cyber café owner, university instructor, government official, doctor, health professional, engineer, foreigner/expatriate, church administrator, merchant, NGO officer, addicted teen, and addicted older youth. After the data is gathered through questionnaire, it is sorted, edited, tabulated and frequency is drawn out. Afterwards, it is analyzed in terms of proportion and percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data is discussed and interpreted as under in terms of gender and age:

**TABLE – 1
INCIDENCE OF CYBER-BULLYING**

Responses	Age and Gender					
	Male Teens	Female Teens	Total Teens	Male Older Youths	Female Older Youths	Total Older Youths
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	26.0	38.6	32.5	29.1	17.4	23.5
No	74.0	61.4	67.5	70.9	82.6	76.5

Source: Computed by the researcher

When the youths were asked whether they harassed someone through social networks, the findings were surprising. The statistics reveal that teens bully more (33%) than older youths (24%) and again for more surprise, females bully more (27%) than male youths (15%). However, more than two third respondents denied practicing online harassment.

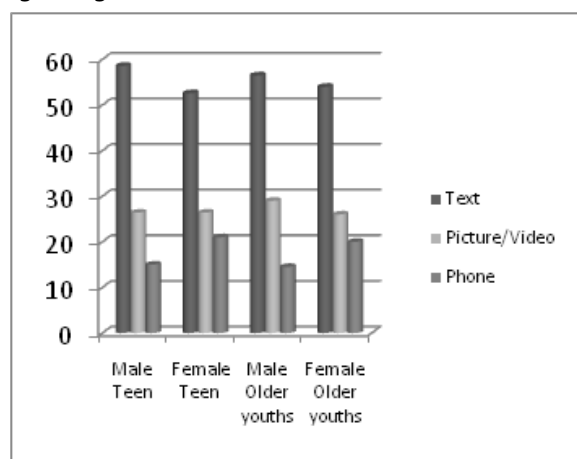
FORMS OF CYBER-BULLYING

Cyber-bullying in recent years has become more apparent, as the use of electronic devices such as computers and mobile phones by young people has increased. It is of many forms such as:

- Text message bullying;
- Picture/Video Clip bullying (via mobile phone cameras);
- Phone call bullying (via cell phone); and
- Bullying via websites.

These forms help better understand what the range of cyber-bullying is (Smith et al 2008) and which form is most prevalent in Ethiopian context.

Figure 1: Forms of Cyber-bullying on social networks by age and gender



The figure of age and gender dynamics depicts that there is no significant difference in the patterns and forms of prominent types of online harassments among males and females as well as teenagers and older youths. Text message is the most reported type of cyber-bullying on social networks; picture and video clip is second ; whereas, phone call is the least reported form of cyber-bullying.

FREQUENCY OF CYBER-BULLYING

Although the rate of online harassment is not very high yet Ethiopians are not exception in cyber-bullying.

**TABLE – 2
FREQUENCY OF CYBER-BULLYING**

Responses	Age and Gender					
	Male Teen	Female Teen	Total Teen	Male Older Youth	Female Older Youth	Total Older Youth
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Daily	3.7	7.0	5.4	6.9	4.3	5.7
Weekly	3.7	10.5	7.2	9.7	13.0	11.3
Fortnightly	12.9	19.3	16.2	23.6	23.3	23.4
Monthly	9.2	5.3	7.2	8.3	4.4	6.4
Quarterly	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.4	1.4	1.4
Biannually	66.7	56.1	61.3	34.8	40.6	37.6
Yearly	0	0	0	1.4	1.4	1.4
Never	1.9	0	0.9	13.9	11.6	12.8

Source: Computed by the researcher

The table manifests that irrespective of age and gender; about half of the sample registers biannual bullying and one fifth registers fortnight bullying. The case of cyber-bullying on daily basis is around (6%) whereas (8%) respondents have never faced any kinds of bullying on their social networks profile.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study pertaining to Cyber-bullying on social networks reveal that surprisingly, Ethiopian teens bully their counterparts more than the elder youths whereas, females bully online more than males. Mostly youths receive texts as a dominant form of cyber-bullying and most of the youths bully bi-annually.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Researches consistently highlight a connection between the practices of seeking access and being exposed to social networks, suggesting that an effective intervention needs to account for the motivations that youths have when they seek access. Blocking access certainly has its place, but if we fail to address those who are seeking access, we will not curtail the most problematic outcomes. The more we create channels of communication between youths and responsible adults and empower youth to play an active role in any intervention, the more successful we will be in combating the challenges we face with respect to risky behaviors and online safety.

One should think and rethink about privacy before posting anything on social networks as it does not exist in the web world. The study exposes that majority of teens and females add everyone in their network which leads them to online harassment.

A properly funded youths’ awareness campaign is needed in order to improve their e-safety. Public education campaigns do have a role to play in changing behavior of the youngsters who use social networks. Otherwise, there is a greater possibility that some innocent youths may engage in the unlawful communications unintentionally which may put them into troubles.

There is a need for training, support and capacity building for youths which should aim to cover the following thrust areas:

- How to “Assess risks in online behaviour”, and recognize dangers, such as grooming patterns;
- What to do about dangers (such as who to contact, how to record activity);
- How to operate safely (such as using privacy settings and adopting appropriate behavior); and
- How to “compare and choose which (network) is a safer online service for them to use.”

Lastly, for cyber-safety, an Online Ombudsman should be appointed at city/regional level. This is the right time for ruling bodies to take care of the issue as it is taking its roots silently.

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